



Leicester
City Council

DRAFT MINUTE EXTRACT

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 28 JANUARY 2016 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Singh (Chair)
Councillor Dempster (Vice Chair)

Councillor Dr Barton
Councillor Chaplin
Councillor Cleaver
Councillor Dawood

Councillor Grant
Councillor Dr Moore
Councillor Newcombe
Councillor Patel

Councillor Porter
Councillor Shelton
Councillor Thomas
Councillor Willmott

Also present:

Sir Peter Soulsby City Mayor
Councillor Rory Palmer Deputy City Mayor

In Attendance

Councillor Joshi
Councillor Unsworth

* * * * *

72. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Senior.

73. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Thomas declared that in respect of Item 9. General Fund Budget

2016/17, his wife had a personal budget from the Leicester City Council.

Councillor Patel declared that in respect of Item 9, General Fund Budget 2016/17 her mother was in receipt of an Adult Social Care package.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the respective Councillors' judgement of the public interest. They were not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

80. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2016/17

Members were asked to consider and comment on the General Fund Revenue Budget 2016/17. The City Mayor introduced the budget and commented that members would be aware of the contents of the budget and the implications of the reduction in the government grant to local authorities. The situation was severe as five years of budget reductions had resulted in the council's grant from central government fall by £86m per year. Because of this, the spending reviews were necessary and they required a great deal of consideration, sensitivity, consultation and amendment throughout the year. Leicester, along with some other urban authorities had suffered disproportionate cuts. Spending reviews so far had enabled the council to undertake a managed reserves policy, some of which had been used to 'cushion' some of those reductions. The reserves however were coming to an end and they would run out next year; therefore it was necessary to continue with the programme of spending reviews.

The Director of Finance explained that there was a targeted spending review programme to make savings of £45m per year and from this, savings of £15m per year had been approved. The social care precept would allow the council to increase council tax by 2% to be used for Adult Social Care services,; however this would not meet the pressures arising from the increase in the national minimum wage.

The Chair praised the council's budget strategy which he said had proved its effectiveness. He then invited comments from Members.

Councillor Cleaver praised the way the council had managed its reserves which helped now to balance the budget; but questioned whether a budget that wasn't balanced would be an illegal budget. The Director of Finance responded that she was the council's Section 151 Officer and by law she had to ensure that the council set a balanced budget and that there was nothing unlawful within that budget.

Councillor Dr Moore queried the provision for inflation from 2017/19 to 2019/20 and the Director of Finance explained that they needed to include a figure for inflation. They used an inflation forecast from the council's advisors and these forecasts would be revised during the year.

Councillor Patel queried a provision of £0.2m and a contingency figure of £3m

in relation to the budget and equalities. She was aware of families, with adults or children with disabilities, who were finding it very difficult to get adaptations made to their house. Concerns were expressed that decisions made in Adult Social Care or Children's services impacted on the quality of life. The Director of Finance explained that the figure of £0.2m would allow for the council to consider the equality impact implications around the decisions that were made and not for people to bid for the money for projects. The budget was a high risk budget and had been for some years; the £3m contingency would help to manage the risk around difficult proposals. For 2015/16 the entire contingency sum would be required to fund the pressures in Adult Social Care.

Councillor Porter queried the budget figures, stating that figures of £85m, £45m and £15m had been quoted and he requested clarification. The Director of Finance replied that para 2.4 of the report referred to the Spending Review Programme with an increase in the amount sought to £45m per year. Of this, £15m had been achieved so far and £85m had been saved since 2010.

Councillor Chaplin, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission referred to a meeting it held with the Adult Social Care Commission on 14 January 2016 to consider the budget. It was noted that para 7.8 of the report made reference that the Director (in Adult Social Care) would work on a number of ways to reduce and contain costs which would include 'reducing and controlling the increasing costs of service users'. At the meeting on 14 January, members had expressed a hope that this would not result in hours of care being taken away from existing service users. Concerns had also been expressed at the impact of the budget cuts on Better Care Together.

The Deputy City Mayor responded that there was no arbitrary target to reduce care packages; this would be inappropriate. The council had a duty to ensure that care needs were met and over the previous two years, more packages had increased than decreased. Some people's care needs may change however over time and they may need less care. Plans were aligned with Better Care Together but the council needed to know how much money would be coming from the NHS towards Adult Social Care as there were people being discharged from the NHS with care needs.

Councillor Chaplin expressed a hope that reviews into open spaces, sports and other related activities, took into consideration the positive impact they had towards promoting health and wellbeing. The Deputy City Mayor responded that in respect of public health, there was a broader range of services including leisure centres and transport which all contributed to public health

A reference was made to the protected characteristics in Appendix 5, para 16 of the report and disappointment was expressed that there was no other mention of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities in terms of the budget. The Deputy City Mayor explained that if there were specific implications of the council tax rise for the LGBT communities, then they should be identified and accounted for. He asked people to let him know if they were aware of any areas or examples where there were implications for this community which had not been identified.

Councillor Cleaver expressed a view that good Adult Social Care started in childhood with support from families and good children's services. Children who were fed well, encouraged to exercise and received a good education had better outcomes as they grew older.

Councillor Wilmott referred to the figures relating to the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLs) and questioned why the figures had increased by 100% from those reported at the previous meeting in December. He said that the council's figures were considerably higher than some other local authorities and suggested that Leicester should look to see what those authorities were doing. He had asked for an explanation at the previous meeting but did not appear to have received one.

The Deputy City Mayor confirmed that he had written a response and would check whether this had been sent. The increase in DoLs was what he would have expected following the Cheshire West Judgement; the council were in the process of looking at their practice and this would include having a more effective review process. Councillor Willmott commented that he would like to return to this issue again.

Councillor Grant commented that there was insufficient detail in the budget to enable members to know whether the proposed savings were achievable. Councillor Grant was advised that the details of the savings and information about the reviews had been published on the council's website.

Councillor Thomas referred to the Adult Social Care budget and stated that there was a need to reassess everyone who had a care plan; they could be stressful but they were necessary. The government had introduced new rules and he was of the view that there would be more losers than winners under their new regime.

Councillor Dawood commented that the spending cuts affected the most deprived people and queried the non-statutory provision that might be available to them. There seemed to be a reliance on good will of the local community which might not always be there. The Deputy City Mayor responded that care needs did not always deteriorate; sometimes they remained the same or improved. They were currently looking at the backlog of reviews and this was important, because intervention might prevent further deterioration. Regarding non-statutory provision there was a need to maintain that infrastructure in communities. An Adult Social Care on-line portal would be available shortly which was easy to use. A query from a member of the public could result in more care being given, or if more appropriate, would signpost to the help and support available in the community.

Councillor Dawood queried whether there was a cost implication as more schools became academies. The Director of Finance responded that the Education Services Grant to local authorities would have been cut where a school moved to an academy, but this was now being cut by 75% anyway. There was however an impact on business rates as the local authorities now

retained part of those rates. With the rising number of academies and cut to the grant, local authorities were waiting for the government to clarify what their responsibilities would now be.

Councillor Dr Barton referred to the declining income in some service areas such as income from council sports facilities as people turned to private gyms. The Director of Finance explained that sports income would be addressed in the forthcoming sports spending review. With the current budget pressures, managers were managing their budgets very carefully.

Queries were raised relating to the cost of agency social workers. The City Mayor explained that this was expected to peak in 2016/17 but then the social workers who were newly qualified would be more experienced and there would be less of a reliance on agency staff.

Councillor Dr Moore referred to the cost arising from Looked After Children and queried how much was spent on external placements and whether these were a result of genuine need or parental pressure. The Director of Finance reported that the number of children in external placements had risen from 33 at the start of the financial year to 37 by the end of period 6. The City Mayor commented that the costs relating to Looked After Children were an issue across the country but there was a balance to be reached between meeting the needs of a child with complex needs and ensuring that s/he was looked after properly and safely in cost effective ways. They were looking at ways to meet that need and he thought that this was an issue that the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission might wish to look at.

The Chair drew the discussion on the General Fund Revenue Budget to a close and asked for the comments for council to be noted. Councillor Chaplin added that there was a lack of detail relating to the Public Health budget and she urged members to be cautious.

AGREED:

that the comments of the Overview Select Committee in relation to the General Fund Revenue Budget 2016/17 be submitted to Council for the meeting on 24 February 2016.